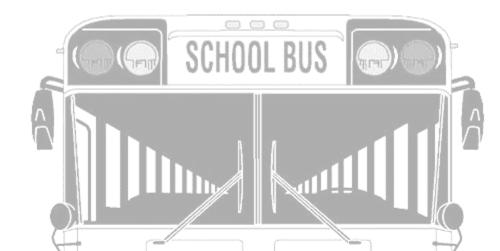
# PUPIL TRANSPORTATION REQUIREMENTS AND REPORTING PROCESSES FOR DIRECT FUNDING



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#### **INITIAL NOTIFICATION OF INTENT TO TRANSPORT**

In 2007, amendments were made to Ohio Revised Code §3314.091 (through the passage of Am. Sub. H.B. 119) allowing community schools, in certain instances, to provide their own transportation services for students and subsequently receive funding directly from the Ohio Department of Education for that service. These changes in code were initiated through careful discussion hosted by Governor Strickland's office with a number of school districts and community schools who have an interest in this matter.

The essence of the amendment is that a community school that is interested in providing their own transportation may make a one-time unilateral decision to do so under the following quidelines:

- 1. The community school (and/or governing authority) did not have a prior agreement with the public school district(s), pursuant to ORC §3314.091(A);
- The community school (and/or governing authority) must provide written notification to the public school district(s) by the 31<sup>st</sup> day of January that is it accepting the responsibility for providing appropriate pupil transportation services for native students to and from the community school for the subsequent school year;
- 3. The community school (and/or governing authority) must provide an exact copy of each written notification it sent to the public school district(s) to the Ohio Department of Education at the address herein:

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CENTER FOR SCHOOL OPTIONS AND FINANCE
PUPIL TRANSPORTATION OFFICE
MR. PETE JAPIKSE, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
25 S. FRONT ST., MS 710
COLUMBUS, OH 43215-4183

- 4. The community school (and/or governing authority) must provide transportation to any and all students required to be transported by law or who would otherwise be transported by the public school district(s) under district policy. Students covered under this requirement must be provided transportation free of charge;
- 5. The community school's (and/or governing authority's) acceptance of responsibility for transportation shall cover an entire school year, and shall remain in effect for subsequent school years; and
- 6. The community school (and/or governing authority) will be required to make reports to the Ohio Department of Education about its transportation activity and costs.
- 7. Transportation services provided is subject to all provisions of the Ohio Revised Code and all rules adopted under the Revised Code pertaining to pupil transportation (ORC 3314.091(A)(3)).

## Relinquishing Transportation Responsibilities

Once approved to provide transportation services, a community school (and/or governing authority) must provide transportation in subsequent school years, in their entirety.

Circumstances may change; however, and a community school may desire to relinquish its responsibility to provide the transportation services in subsequent school years. In such instances, the governing authority of the community school must notify the public school district, in writing, prior to the 31<sup>st</sup> day of January if the community school wishes to relinquish its responsibility to transport.

NOTE: If the community school relinquishes the responsibility to transport it will still be responsible for transporting eligible students throughout the remainder of the current school year.

The governing authority shall submit a copy of the written intent to relinquish responsibility for transportation services to the Ohio Department of Education at the address herein:

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CENTER FOR SCHOOL OPTIONS AND FINANCE
PUPIL TRANSPORTATION OFFICE
MR. PETE JAPIKSE, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
25 S. FRONT ST., MS 710
COLUMBUS, OH 43215-4183

If a governing authority fails to notify the public school and the Ohio Department of Education at the address identified above the community school shall remain responsible for providing transportation services for eligible students for the following school year.

If after relinquishing its responsibility to transport the governing authority of a community school later decides it wishes to reassume the responsibility to provide transportation services, such responsibility shall only be re-granted if the public school district(s) affected concur with the request.

#### **OBLIGATION TO ADHERE TO RULES AND REGULATIONS**

The governing authority accepting responsibility for transporting students enrolled in its respective community school(s) must comply with all portions of the Ohio Revised Code and all rules (Ohio Administrative Code) adopted under the Revised Code pertaining to pupil transportation. Contracting with a third party for provision of pupil transportation services does not relieve the community school from the responsibility of ensuring compliance with all of the aforementioned rules and codes.

This may include, but is not limited to:

- 1. Purchasing and maintaining appropriate yellow school buses, or purchasing appropriate contracted services;
- 2. Presenting school buses to the Ohio State Highway Patrol for annual and "spot" inspections;
- 3. Obtaining and maintaining a private pupil transportation license from the Office of Licensing and Commercial Standards of the Ohio State Highway Patrol; and
- 4. Employing appropriately licensed, certified and qualified drivers.

All records pertaining to pupil transportation are subject to review by state agencies not limited to the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Public Safety/Ohio State Highway Patrol, and the Ohio Auditor of State.

Failure to adhere to Ohio Revised Code and all rules (Ohio Administrative Code) adopted under the Revised Code pertaining to pupil transportation will result in a loss of funding for the community school.

Questions concerning private pupil transportation licensure should be directed to the Office of Licensing and Commercial Standards at the Ohio State Highway Patrol by calling 614-466-4056.

Questions concerning the Ohio Pupil Transportation Operations and Safety Rules should be directed to the Pupil Transportation Office at the Ohio Department of Education by calling 614-466-4230.

#### STUDENT COUNT AND REPORTING PROCESS

Once the Pupil Transportation Office receives appropriate notification from a community school (and/or governing authority) that the school wishes to assume the responsibility for providing transportation services for its students, it shall notify the Office of School Funding and Fiscal Support Services. The community school will then be granted access to a special transportation reporting section within the SOES System.

## Counting

Prior to a community school receiving payment for the pupils it is transporting, the students must be counted and reported to the Pupil Transportation Office at the Ohio Department of Education.

Students shall be counted only once each day, regardless of how many vehicles they ride. Students should be counted on their ride to school. Students who are not present on the bus may not be included in the counts.

Eligible riders are kindergarten through 12 grade pupils who are enrolled in the school and are actually riding the bus during the designated count week.

Students must be counted daily and reported to a school official, who will then enter this data into the SOES system.

Transportation funding is only provided for the average daily number of eligible pupils who are actually transported during the first full week of October. Students who are not actually on the bus may not be reported, and will not be included in the funding calculation.

In rare cases a school may not have normal attendance during the first full week of October. Schools who wish to request a waiver to count during a different week must request permission prior to the count week.

#### Reporting

The community school shall be responsible for reporting the ridership of each of their students as counted above through the SOES System. Through SOES, community schools shall report:

- 1. If a student was transported during the first full week of October that school was in session by checking the appropriate box; and
- 2. Which day(s) of the week the student was transported by checking the appropriate box(es).

All data entry must be completed by community school personnel, using the SOES System, on or before 1 November of each year.

Community schools must also complete Form T1-CS and submit the signed document to the Pupil Transportation Office on or before 1 November of each year. This report collects required data including the type of transportation provided, grade

## STUDENT COUNT AND REPORTING PROCESS

level and distance from school for each child. The total number of students reported on form T1-CS must match the total number of students reported in SOES.

# **Record retention**

Bus Count records must be kept for a minimum of 5 years for auditing purposes.

#### FLAGGING CAPABILITY OF TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

On 1 November, the data entry period for community schools closes and the SOES Administrator of public school district(s) affected will begin a review of the information for concurrence. During this review the public school district may place a flag on a student record for one of several reasons.

The flags, as identified in the SOES Manual include:

#### 1. DISTANCE INCORRECT DUE TO INCORRECT ADDRESS

The distance entered by the community school is incorrect because the student's address is incorrect<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. DISTANCE INCORRECT

The distance is incorrect.

#### 3. NOT ELIGIBLE PER DISTRICT POLICY

Student does not qualify for transportation from the community school in accordance with the resident district's policy,

# 4. STUDENT GUARANTEED TRANSPORTATION VIA IEP/RELATED SERVICE

Student transportation is provided via IEP/related service and paid under that service.

Each traditional public school shall have two weeks following the reporting deadline to review student ridership data and enter flags into the transportation records in SOES.

Community school staff can view transportation flags on a student record when logged into the SOES System. Both community school and public school district staff should work together to reconcile problems with flags.

Students with a flag placed on their record will not be funded for transportation.

Following the two-week period for public school districts to flag a student, the staff from the community school and the traditional public school has an additional two weeks to resolve any disputes on flagged students.

Questions concerning the SOES **transportation-specific flags** should be addressed to the Pupil Transportation Office by calling 877-644-6338.

Questions concerning SOES **"fatal flags"** should be addressed to the Office of School Funding and Fiscal Support Services by calling 877-644-6338.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Measurement of distance shall be in accordance with Ohio Administrative Code 3301-83-01 (G)

#### **PROCESS FOR DATA VALIDATION**

The Pupil Transportation Office will review transportation data entered into the SOES System prior to the data being processed for payment.

In an effort to ensure the process is clearly understood and to promote fiscal responsibility, the Ohio Department of Education may request supporting documentation from public school district(s) and community school(s) (and/or governing authorities) when the agency deems it to be necessary and/or appropriate.

For instances where a problem is identified either in the data or in the data collection process, a representative of the Ohio Department of Education shall work with the public school district(s) and community school(s) as necessary to correct the problem and to ensure that all parties have a clear understanding of the appropriate data collection processes.

#### **CALCULATION OF PAYMENT**

The calculation of payment (for eligible pupils who were transported by a community school during the first full week of October that school was in session) shall be made by the Pupil Transportation Office of the Ohio Department of Education.

Payment is calculated based upon the average number of actual bus riders as counted and reported during count week. Students who have transportation flags or who have fatal flags are not included in the calculation.

In accordance with state budget law, funding for student transportation services will be calculated on a formula basis. The community school shall receive the same calculated per-student rate that the public school district would have received if the public school district would have provided transportation.

This process calculates a unique per-student rate for each public school district from which a community school draws students. The unique rate for each child's public school district of residence will be the rate paid to the community school. This will most likely result in a different amount per each child based upon the district of residence.

The funding formula also establishes different payment rates for different types of transportation service. The per-student funding will be different if the student is transported in a yellow bus, public transit vehicle or vehicle other than school bus.

Transportation provided in vehicles that do not meet standards for pupil transportation is not allowed and will not be funded. Additionally, funding will not be paid unless all requirements are met, including provision of legal pupil transportation service. Funding may be reduced or prorated if it is determined that legal transportation service has not been provided.

#### **FUNDING DISTRIBUTION**

When transportation data has been approved, when it has been processed and payment has been calculated, funding distribution for the current school year is scheduled to be included in the February community school payment. Payments will normally continue monthly thereafter.

Problems with data or service audits may delay transportation payments.

Community schools who are just starting transportation for the first year must submit their counts through the aforementioned process prior to receiving first payment. Payments will be initiated in January or February of the current school year, and will continue monthly through the end of the school year. The entire year's amount of funding will be included in that funding flow.

In subsequent years, the annualized funding amount will be continued as an estimate until the new funding is calculated based on the new year's count. Once the new funding is calculated, the payments will be adjusted, usually beginning in January or February of the current school year.

## YEAR-END REPORTING

At the end of a school year, the community school shall submit a T2-CS report to the Pupil Transportation Office. This report shall be submitted on or before 1 August following the close of the school year.

The T2-CS report shall contain the total actual expenditures by the community school for the provision of pupil transportation services.

# **RECONCILIATION**

ORC 3314.091 requires all transportation funding paid to the community school to be used for the transportation provided.

Any funds paid that are not supported by the T2-CS will be recovered from the community school.